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Eased Labor Camp Conditions Reported in Letter by Shcharansky

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

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MOSCOW, Feb. 3 — Anatoly B. Shcharansky, the Jewish activist, reported in a letter from labor camp last month that he was being treated better, his brother said here today.

The brother, Leonid B. Shcharansky, said the family did not know whether the improved conditions, including better medical care and more time for reading, walking and resting, were related to a possible release.

He said the family was hopeful although it had received no word from the Soviet authorities or from the United States Embassy regarding a reported plan to release Leonid

Shcharansky as part of an East-West exchange of intelligence agents.

"There have been rumors before and I hoped for Anatoly's release, but I did not really believe it would happen," the brother said. "This time I believe it will."

American officials said Sunday in Washington that the proposed exchange was scheduled for Feb. 11 on a bridge between East and West Berlin that has been used for such exchanges in the past.

Sentenced in 1978 to 13 Years

Anatoly Shcharansky was sentenced in 1978 to 13 years in prison and labor camps for treason, espionage and anti-Soviet agitation. President Carter pub-

licly denied that Mr. Shcharansky ever carried out intelligence assignments for the United States. Western groups contend that he was prosecuted because of his activity on behalf of would-be Jewish emigrants.

In the West, he has become one of the most widely publicized Soviet dissidents and his case has turned into a symbol of Soviet human rights practices. He is currently in a labor camp near Perm in the Urals. Before being transferred to the camp in late 1984, he served six years in prison at Chistopol in the Tatar Autonomous Republic.

Western diplomats and Soviet rights activists say that his release would be a positive step, but would not change the situation of other would-be emigrants. Emigration from the Soviet Union is generally restricted, although large numbers of Jews as well as Germans and Armenians were allowed to leave in the 1970's. The number of emigrants has dropped sharply in recent years.

Link to Gorbachev Policy

The diplomats said the release of Mr. Shcharansky would be another indication that Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, apparently intended to resolve some rights cases as a means of improving relations with the West. Nine cases involving Soviet citizens linked to the United States have been resolved in recent weeks.

But the diplomats said that the resolution of a small number of cases would not constitute an overall change in the Soviet policy of restricting emigration, particularly for so-called refuseniks, people deemed to have been engaged in secret work in the past.

One such person, Aleksandr Lerner, a Jewish computer mathematician who has sought emigration for 15 years, said today:

"If Anatoly is freed, there will be a great festival among all his friends, relatives and fellow refuseniks, but that does not mean we would follow

him. Shcharansky is a special case, a separate problem, and we have seen no sign of improvement in the general area of Jewish emigration."

Naum Meiman, another Jewish who has been barred from leaving, said, "I am very glad for Anatoly and his family, but this has no meaning for the general question of the observance of human rights in the Soviet Union."

Mr. Lerner and Mr. Meiman said they had heard about the possible release on broadcasts from the Voice of America.

Leonid Shcharansky said the latest letter received from his brother was completed Jan. 6. He said that, in the 30-page letter, "Anatoly reported that conditions had improved but he did not know why."

The brother said he inferred from the letter that Mr. Shcharansky, who is reported in precarious health, might have been moved to a camp hospital.